

## The Hill by Lashanda Anakwah

Haide is throwing little pieces of paper at me. It's lunchtime and I'm starved. My little Styrofoam plate is almost empty; the food, questionable lasagna, isn't particularly good but I want more of it. The cafeteria is at a low rumble; it isn't chaotic but it's far from quite. The lunch aides are walking around, looking for something, I'm not sure what. Today is just like every other school day; it probably wouldn't be memorable if Haide weren't throwing pieces of paper on me. Everyday of seventh grade has started to blur together. I'm sitting with Bridgette, one of my only friends; she notices the tissue throwing. "Ummmm", Bridgette likes to start every sentence with a long drawn out um, a habit I'm starting to pick up to the dismay of my parents. "Why is Haide throwing paper at you?" I shrug. I was hoping the little white particles that kept flying my way were a coincidence but Bridgette sees it too so there is no denying it.

"There's a garbage can right next to you," I say to Haide. I turn to look at Bridgette; I can't believe I just said something so witty and brave.

"I am throwing it at the garbage." Haide does a little giggle when she says this and turns and looks at the group of girls she's sitting with. Her facial expression says it all. She is not used to this type of behavior; it is new and exciting for her. I am mortified; my face is hot and I don't know where to look, how to breathe, embarrassment is like a slow death for me. Did she just call me garbage? I want to ask this question out loud but I don't want to speak the hurt into existence. Keeping it to myself will prevent it from being real.

I don't remember having any problems with Haide but lately she's been craving popularity so bad I can see it in her eyes. I know Haide as the girl who is obsessed with the Jonas Brothers; her style can best be described as a cross between gothic and girly. Her eyes are always lined with black eye shadow, her lashes coated to the extreme with mascara, yet she never fails to wear her bright pink bow. With the constant, non-stop attention she gives Kiana and the rest of them, it's a wonder she can't see it. If she were going to be part of their group she would already be in it. Kiana and the rest of the girls have family ties, live around the same block and think the same way. They are four peas in a pod. There is something about them that has always unnerved me. They seemed determined to not be innocent. Haide can't be in their group with her high-pitched laughter and agreeable disposition. I feel a mixture of rage and sympathy towards her. She's been laughing at all their jokes lately and all their jokes are at the expense of other people.

School seems to go on forever. I notice Haide making a great attempt not to look at me. We are split into groups to discuss a reading in social studies. The tables are made of a cheap looking wood; the teacher's desk is some kind of metal. The chalkboard is a dark green, and the walls are a yellow tinted cream color. The lighting is a bit dim. The teacher Mr.Boyle is always red, as if he were blushing all over his body constantly. Kiana and the rest of them are huddled up and talking—definitely not about the reading. Every ten seconds or so, one of them looks up and eyes me. They are making plans that include me and at that moment I hate them; they are deciding things that have to do with me without my consent. They have all the power, and there is no explanation as to why, it is just that way. It's 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

While the teacher's back is turned, Kiana walks up to me. I look up at her, expecting the worse. She doesn't even know how to talk to me. She attempts a smile.

"So um, if Haide wanted to fight you, would you fight her?"

"Yeah." I say it quick and confidently, the opposite of what I'm feeling.

Kiana practically squeals and runs back to her table.

Bridgette laughs, "Are you really going to fight Haide?"

I explain that it probably won't happen. Kiana and the rest of them are just bored. But by the end of the day the seventh grade is simmering with rumors of a fight after school. I'm getting excited myself. This is the most I've been talked about in all my years of school but I know, I'm absolutely sure, it won't happen. I kind of feel bad for getting everyone's hopes up. Bridgette is amazed by my calm; she keeps breaking out into fits of laughter and I laugh along. She is more nervous than I am. She starts giving me fighting tips. I pretend to listen. In no time, I'll be on my way to pickup my little sister. Maybe we'll go to the park and swing for a while. The bell rings, the sound that never fails to make me happy even though there's not much happening at home.

School is over and they've seized me. Kiana and some other girl are pulling on my arms, moving me forward. "I have to go pick up my sister," I tell them in a small voice. They reassure me that she'll be fine. They're holding onto me tight, afraid I'll flee. Kiana and the others have arranged all the details for the fight like professionals. I look around hoping an adult will notice what is taking place. They're pulling me across the street. It's a nice day, the sky is *so* blue. I want nothing more

than to be on a swing, flying with the sun on my face. Won't somebody help me? I'm scared. Fighting is wrong, *fighting is wrong*. I know that. Why don't they? I cannot imagine that Haide wants to fight, but knowing Kiana, she's whispered sweet promises of popularity in Haide's ear. She's convinced Haide it'll be an easy fight. I can hear her in my head, *It's Lashanda, come on*. There is no saying no to Kiana; I can't even fathom the idea.

There is already a sizable crowd gathered at the little space between the buildings on the hill right across from the school. I'm looking around nervously; Haide is in the corner, waiting. She doesn't look at me. We stand there, unsure of what to do, like actors who have forgotten their lines. We both know the significance of this fight. Someone is shouting at us to fight. I drop my book bag on the pavement. Someone cheers. "Yo, Lashanda's a G. did you see the way she dropped her bag?" Kiana shouts at Haide to hit me. She comes towards me and I'm suddenly very angry. I've been angry for a very long time. I'm pushing Haide into the brick wall suddenly, beating on her face. I'm trying to push her into the street. I'm trying to kill her. At the moment she represents all the times I wanted to do or say something but didn't because I am a *good kid*. I was taught not to say mean things but I am stuck in a world where people do. People break rules and are praised for it. Kiana is the meanest girl I know, and the most popular. It's as if my parents raised me to be a loser.

Haide is rolling around on the floor, completely curled up in herself. The kids in the crowd are bloodthirsty. They cheer and clap, instruct me on where to hit. "Get her face!"

“Beat her down!”

Everyone wants a good view. I see my friend out the corner of my eye, Bridgette. She is cheering me on. She is *ecstatic*, ecstatic that I am fighting. Everyone is really happy, even though what I am doing is wrong. I must be winning. The crowd seems really far away. The sky is still so very blue.

An adult is heading up the hill; the crowd disperses. Kids scatter every which way. I run up the hill to pick up my sister. I feel exhilarated. It feels *so good* to be bad; I had really been missing out. Haide should have known better than to mess with me, she got what she deserved. The day is so nice but there is no time for the park now. I need to hurry up and get home. An influx of thoughts overcomes me. Everyone will think of me differently now. Maybe Kiana and the rest of them will treat me with some respect. I have broken out of my mold and I don't even know who I am anymore. I like it, the change. I've been the same boring me my whole life, the victim, and now I am the culprit. Oh my gosh—I'm cool.

I'm walking faster now. I turn a corner and hear some one call my name. There's no mistaking that voice, I think about running but there's an adult calling me and I can't make my legs move. I turn around. The figure calling me is tall and thin, with an impressive brown red goatee. He's always reminded me of a cowboy. Right now he looks exactly like one. He gestures at me to come to him. It's the dean and like the police, he has come way too late.